

# *Dateline DHMH*

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

## **DHMH Coordinates Pandemic Flu Exercise**

In keeping with DHMH's pro-active goal to be fully prepared in the event of a health emergency, the agency in April coordinated a pandemic flu exercise. This drill simulated a possible real-life scenario and included participants from the Governor's Office, the Maryland Homeland Security Department, DHMH, local health departments and many others.

The exercise covered the progression of an influenza pandemic from initial recognition of bird flu cases in Asia through the first wave of human illness in the United States.

## ***A reminder***

DHMH employees in the Standard Pay Plan and the Executive Pay Plan will receive a \$752 general increase effective July 1.

In addition, Standard Pay Plan salary increments will be offered in fiscal year 2005. Employees eligible for July increments with performance ratings of "meets standards" or above will receive an increment effective July 1. Also, based on performance ratings, employees eligible for January increments will receive them beginning January 1.

Participants were challenged to work through various scenarios related to a serious and deadly flu outbreak in Maryland.

The exercise explored issues such as isolation of travelers during an epidemic, establishment of mass vaccination clinics, provision of mental health services, communications, and recovery operations.

Recent computer models from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that a pandemic flu could kill more than 200,000 people in the U. S. The pandemic flu in 1918 killed 20 million people, well before the emergence of global air travel. A similar flu epidemic today could spread farther and faster and prove more deadly.

More information about influenza is available by clicking on 'flu information' at [www.edcp.org](http://www.edcp.org).

## **Performance Excellence Awards**

Secretary Sabatini will present the **2004 DHMH Performance Excellence Awards** at a ceremony to be held on June 22 from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. in the O'Connor Building lobby.

The awards recognize outstanding customer service, innovation, leadership, and process improvement.

Framed certificates and eight hours of administrative leave will be awarded to the 24 individuals and 11 teams whose nominations have earned the Department's highest recognition. These honorees are from 107 nominations submitted this year and evaluated by a committee representing a cross-section of the department.

Employees with approval from their supervisors are encouraged to attend and support fellow co-workers as they receive well-earned recognition.

For questions about the ceremony or the awards, please contact Lee Williamson by e-mail at [lwilliamson@dhmh.state.md.us](mailto:lwilliamson@dhmh.state.md.us) or on 410-767-5190; or Kimberly Isaac-Dallas at [kisaac@dhmh.state.md.us](mailto:kisaac@dhmh.state.md.us) or 410-767-6485.



## Gardening Your Way to Better Health

Is the warm sun of a Maryland spring giving you the urge to dig in the garden? Then give some thought to creating a community garden as a way to enhance your neighborhood.

Community gardens produce nutritious food, create opportunities for physical activity and recreation, and improve community spirit and congeniality. They also contribute to a better quality of life by beautifying neighborhoods with green space.

However, these garden projects need committed, dedicated volunteers and financial support. The latter is usually available through community grants and in-kind donations.



Participants usually rent a plot for the season where water, soil, mulch — and sometimes even gardening tools — are provided. Often, individual gardeners are asked to contribute a share of the fruits and vegetables produced to a food bank or food pantry, thus providing more fresh food in the community.

The community garden concept is far from new. Gardens were used by the Works Progress Administration during the Depression to provide jobs. “Victory” gardens emerged during World Wars I and II and produced a significant percentage of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States.

You can keep the community garden idea alive by organizing a group of interested neighbors. Many Cooperative Extension programs provide resources for community gardening, such as the Master Gardener Program. Or, you can follow the “Ten Steps to Starting a Community Garden” found at: [http://foodshare.net/toolbox\\_month07.htm](http://foodshare.net/toolbox_month07.htm).

*Editor’s Note: Thanks to the staff in the Family Health Administration’s Division of Cardiovascular Health and Nutrition for writing this article.*

## Nursing Schools Are Full, but Shortage Remains

The good news is nursing schools in Maryland are bulging at the seams with capacity numbers of students. In fact, qualified applicants are being turned away. But the bad news is the nursing shortage continues in the State.

The reason? Nurses are retiring at a faster rate than the schools can teach and train replacements. And, the impact of this trend is not expected to peak for another three or four years.

A number of reasons contribute to the gap between newly-educated nurses and those retiring, according to Donna Dorsey, executive director of the Maryland Board of Nursing. At least 10,000 Maryland nurses will be eligible to retire in the next five years. In 2003, only 3,425 nurses entered the profession in Maryland, of whom 1,800 were new graduates. Those remaining nurses were new residents to the State.

The aging of the workforce, along with work schedules, pay rates and lack of nurse-friendly workplaces have led to an increase in the number of retirees. Meanwhile, the costs associated with a nursing education, along with a reduced emphasis on recruitment of teachers and location of clinical placement sites, have taken its toll.

To retain existing nurses, the Statewide Commission on the Crisis in Nursing has recommended that nurses be involved in clinical decisions that can make a difference in providing safe and quality patient care.

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Joan Lawrence (left) and Tamarra Banks show off the second place Health Expo Decorating Contest ribbon given to the Board of Pharmacy’s booth at the 2004 Flower Mart.

## Nursing Shortage *Continued*

It also supported successful legislation that prohibits involuntary overtime, provides 'whistle-blower' protection, and calls for HIV testing of patients when healthcare providers come into contact with body fluids.

To increase the number of nursing candidates, the Commission supports increasing financial aid in sufficient amounts to ensure all qualified candidates have access to an education. Increased focus has also been placed in elementary through high schools settings to attract future nurses.

The Commission is also in the process of establishing guidelines to recruit and maintain veteran nurses, improve workplace civility, reduce workplace stress, and to address the scope of practice for licensed practical nurses.

In addition, it is working to foster career path development for nurses, increase and maintain gender and ethnic diversity in nursing programs, and introduce 'health career clubs' in secondary schools across the state.

The Commission has 53 members representing practicing nurses in specialty areas, nurse educators, physicians, legislators, nurse executives, and consumers.

### College Student says, "Leave the cloud, join the crowd"

*"Leave the cloud, join the crowd,"* a slogan created by Montgomery College sophomore Shivani Agarwal, is the winning phrase in a month-long "Write It. Don't Light It." slogan contest

sponsored by the *Maryland — Smoking Stops Here* campaign.

Agarwal, a member of her college's Students Together Organizing Prevention Strategies (S.T.O.P.S.) Coalition, was one of nearly 100 students to develop a slogan in 10 words or less to describe why they like to socialize without smoke. The contest produced more than 225 entries by students from 18 Maryland colleges and universities.

Two additional entries were given honorable mentions:

- "Parties are better crowded, not clouded." by Heather Whiting, a sophomore biology major from Washington College.
- "Smoking is antisocial — be the life of the party." by Mary Anwar, a senior criminal justice major at Frostburg State University.

Agarwal's slogan will be featured on the Comcast SportsNet Community Calendar, the SportsNet "Stops

of the Game" and [www.SmokingStopsHere.com](http://www.SmokingStopsHere.com). She also will receive box seats to a Baltimore Orioles game donated by Comcast SportsNet, and a \$50 Target gift card donated by the department store chain.

The S.T.O.P.S. Coalition comprises 10 Maryland college and university tobacco control coalitions across the State. They have united to create healthier, tobacco-free campuses by building relationships with other campuses; offering prevention and education initiatives; establishing and supporting policies; and sustaining diverse involvement.

The college coalition members include Anne Arundel Community College, Bowie State University, Chesapeake College, College of Southern Maryland, Frostburg State University, Harford Community College, Montgomery College, Prince George's Community College, Towson University and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

For more information, visit [www.smokingstopshere.com/GetInvolved/college.cfm](http://www.smokingstopshere.com/GetInvolved/college.cfm).

*Employees from the Center for Maternal and Child Health raised \$700 during the March of Dimes Walk in April.*

*They include (standing from left) Sharon Kahn, Zena Kahn, Astria Millner, Maureen Edwards, Mary Johnson and Laurie Kettinger. Kneeling (from left) are Alex, Steve and Zakary Kettinger.*





## Calendar of Events

Tuesday, June 8 — *conference*: **Closing the Health Care Divide: Eliminating Disparities for Racial and Ethnic Minority Communities**; University of Maryland Baltimore County; 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Log on to [www.mdhealthdisparities.org](http://www.mdhealthdisparities.org) for more information.

Tuesday, June 8 — *workshop*: **A Strategic Approach to Hiring and Retaining the Best: A Model for the Human Services**; University of Maryland School of Social Work; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$125. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Thursday, October 7 — *conference*: **Suicide Prevention Conference**. Please contact Henry Westray, Jr., at 410-402-8494 or by e-mail at [westrayh@dhhm.state.md.us](mailto:westrayh@dhhm.state.md.us) for more information. Sponsored by the Governor's Interagency Workshop on Youth Suicide Prevention.

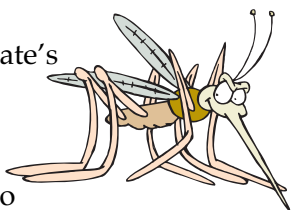
Thursday and Friday, November 4 - 5 — *conference*: **2004 Maryland Rural Summit**; Solomons, MD. Please log on to [www.rural.state.md.us](http://www.rural.state.md.us) for more information. Co-sponsored by the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.

## West Nile Virus Calls Maryland Home

Although this summer is one of those rare times when many of us have to put up with the 17-year cycle of cicadas, Marylanders can add West Nile virus (WNV) to the list of things we endure every summer. After five years of steady growth, it appears that our viral foe is here to stay.

And in that period, the State's emphasis on WNV has shifted from surveillance to prevention and education.

"The virus has been found across the state," said Kim Mitchell, DHMH's West Nile Virus Coordinator. "Since the disease has



become endemic — we know the virus will be back every year — we have eliminated the testing of dead birds."

Now, the major concern among residents is the increased presence of mosquitoes in their neighborhoods.

To address this issue, DHMH works with the Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Mosquito Control Office to assess the needs of communities and determine the best course of action, which could include treatment with insecticides.

But we don't stop there. Personal efforts also are essential in controlling the spread of West Nile. "Our educational campaign focuses on teaching the public how to minimize mosquito

breeding areas around their homes," Mitchell said.

The following tips can help you reduce mosquitoes around your home:

- Dispose of outdoor tin cans, plastic containers, pet feeding dishes, ceramic pots or other water-holding containers.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Clean clogged gutters in spring and fall.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Change the water in bird-baths at least once a week.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants when outdoors.
- Wear insect repellents containing DEET when outdoors. Apply as directed on the product label.
- Avoid being outdoors at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.

By following these simple recommendations, you improve your chances of staying healthy, even though WNV is affecting more people.

Human cases jumped from six reported in 2001 to 36 in 2002, to 73 in 2003.

In humans, infection with WNV can cause symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches, and occasionally skin rash and swollen lymph nodes.

While most people will at most experience mild flu-like symptoms, a small number of infected people will develop more severe symptoms such as high fever, neck stiffness, coma, convulsions, paralysis.

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## West Nile Virus *Continued*

Death from the disease is possible but rare. People over the age of 50 have the highest risk severe illness or death.

More information on WNV is available by clicking on the 'West Nile Virus' link in the 'Hot Issues' portion of the DHMH Web site at [www.dhmh.state.md.us](http://www.dhmh.state.md.us).

*Editor's Note: Thanks to Tara Snyder, Community Health Educator in the Center of Health Promotion, Education and Tobacco Use Prevention, for writing this article.*

## Volunteer Mental Health Crisis Counselors Are Needed

The Mental Hygiene Administration (MHA) is recruiting volunteer mental health crisis counselors to be members of the state's emergency preparedness and response plan.

Individuals interested in this volunteer effort will receive extensive training in mental health disaster response.

Prospective volunteers must be licensed and in good standing with their appropriate licensing boards, including the Maryland Board of Physicians, Board of Social Work Examiners, Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists, and Board of Examiners of Psychologists. Members of the clergy are also eligible to apply for the program.

To become a volunteer, MHA must approve each applicant and

the individual must complete all required training.

For more information about joining the Maryland Mental Health Volunteer Corps or to request brochures, applications or training forms, please contact Sig Lipsitz at the University of Maryland Baltimore at 410-328-8404 or by e-mail at [slips001@umaryland.edu](mailto:slips001@umaryland.edu); or contact Jenny Howes or Rachael Kaul at the MHA at 410-724-3235.

## Other Volunteers Needed

Other health professionals being recruited include physicians, pharmacists and nurses.

Interested physicians may register by logging on to [www.mbp.state.md.us](http://www.mbp.state.md.us) or by calling 410-764-4780. Training session information is available at [www.mbp.state.md.us](http://www.mbp.state.md.us).

Pharmacists can visit their Board's Web site at [www.mdbop.org/alert/volunteerform.htm](http://www.mdbop.org/alert/volunteerform.htm) for an application. You may download the registration form or contact Joan Lawrence at 410-764-4755 or by e-mail at [rxemergency@dhmh.state.md.us](mailto:rxemergency@dhmh.state.md.us) for a copy.

Nurses should contact the Board of Nursing at 410 585-1923 or go to the Board's Web site at [www.mbon.org](http://www.mbon.org) for more information.

## Pregnancy Health Survey Results

Sixty-four percent of Maryland mothers who completed a 2001 DHMH survey reported one or more medical complications during pregnancy, and 20 percent of these women were hospitalized for one or more days.

This and other important data are contained in a new report called *Maryland PRAMS Report, 2001 Births*.

The 86-question survey asked randomly selected mothers who gave birth in 2001 about their health, behaviors, quality of care, and experiences in the time before, during and shortly after their pregnancies.

The surveys are funded by a federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) program known as PRAMS (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System).

Other key findings include:

- Forty-two percent of all pregnancies were unintended.
- Of mothers who were trying to get pregnant, four percent used assisted reproductive technology.
- Seventy-eight percent of mothers began prenatal care during the first trimester

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## GroupWise Update

Please remember that employees using the latest version of GroupWise e-mail software will need to use a new Web address to log into the system from remote locations. The new address is <http://mail.dhmh.md.gov>. This newest version of GroupWise was installed on Department computers beginning in late May.

## Pregnancy Health Survey

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- (<13 weeks) of pregnancy and less than one percent received no care.
- Nine percent of women smoked during pregnancy and eight percent reported using alcohol.
  - Four percent of mothers reported being physically abused by a husband or partner during pregnancy.
  - Thirteen percent of newborns were admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit.
  - □ Seventy-six percent of infants were breast-fed after delivery and 64 percent were breast-fed four weeks or longer.
  - Sixty-one percent of infants were usually placed on their backs to go to sleep.
  - Twenty percent of women reported being at least moderately depressed during the postpartum period.

PRAMS, which started in 1987, is designed to obtain information that may help to prevent infant mortality and low birth weight.

Copies of the report are available on the Internet by clicking on the report's name found under the 'What's New' category at [www.fha.state.md.us/](http://www.fha.state.md.us/). For further information, contact Diana Cheng, M.D., Project Director of Maryland PRAMS, at 410-767-6713.

**Oops!** Last month's article on the Office of Human Resources omitted three division chiefs. **Joe Elliott** is the newly-appointed chief of Recruitment and Selection, **Beth Reid** is newly-appointed as chief of Employment Services, and **Christine Brigandi** remains as chief of Classification and Compensation.

## Obstetrics Information Included In New Guide

For the first time, consumers will be able to obtain information on obstetrics services in every Maryland hospital, via the new edition of the *Maryland Hospital Performance Evaluation Guide*. This Guide will help expectant mothers and their families make informed decisions about the care they receive before, during, and after birth.

This latest version of the report, released in May by the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC) and the Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC), marks an important step in providing information to a broader range of Maryland residents.

It is available on the Web under 'Consumer Information' at [www.mhcc.state.md.us](http://www.mhcc.state.md.us).

The site provides information on the level of obstetrics care that can be provided at a hospital. For example, a Level I hospital can provide care for normal births and births with minor complications while a Level III hospital can handle very complicated cases or newborns with serious illnesses or abnormalities.

A consumer can decide on the best type of facility based on an expectant mother's medical condition, the geographic location of the facility, and physician preference. The site also provides educational information and additional links to State and national resources.

To assist with the development of the new section on obstetrics, the MHCC convened an Obstetrics

Workgroup composed of experts in the areas of maternal and child health.

The Guide also contains information on other selected quality measures and facility characteristics. This includes the location of the hospital, number of beds, ownership information and accreditation status. Also featured is information on 33 high volume medical conditions. For each hospital, consumers can compare the volume, length-of-stay, and readmission rate for each condition.

For further information, please contact Enrique Martinez-Vidal, MHCC Deputy Director for Performance and Benefits, at 410-764-3460.



STATE OF MARYLAND

**DHMH**

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